



Jenny Rathbone MS,
Chair,
Equality and Social Justice Committee
Senedd Cymru
Cardiff Bay
CF99 1SN

1 September 2021

Dear Ms Rathbone,

Many congratulations on your appointment as chair of the new Equality and Social Justice Committee. I am writing as Head of Wales Office for the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists. I appreciate the wide-ranging remit of the committee and the many calls on the committee's time but wanted to take an early opportunity to raise the possibility of a short inquiry into the speech, language and communication needs of young people in the youth justice estate. As the facts below highlight, this is a significant issue which could benefit from a timely, focused review.

Key facts

- Up to **60%** of young people in the youth justice estate have speech, language & communication needs (Bryan et al, 2007).
- **66%-90%** of young offenders have low language skills. 46-67% of these are in the poor or very poor range (Bryan et al, 2007).
- Around **40%** of young offenders find it difficult or are unable to access and benefit from rehabilitation programmes that are delivered verbally, such as drug rehabilitation courses (Bryan et al, 2004).

To our knowledge, this issue was last reviewed by the Senedd over ten years ago when the then Communities and Culture Committee report 'Youth justice: the experience of Welsh children in the secure estate' (2010) highlighted a lack of provision in Wales for young and adult offenders who have speech language and communication needs and recommended the Welsh Government enable pilot work to be done in Wales on the potential benefits of speech and language therapy for juvenile offenders both in custody and on release. Despite evidence from the pilots, provision remains extremely patchy over a decade later. This was briefly touched upon by the recent Health Committee inquiry on the provision of health and social care in the adult prison estate in Wales in which the governor of HMP Parc acknowledged that there was unmet need for speech and language therapy among the prison population.

We believe a potential short inquiry by the committee could be extremely helpful in shining a light on this key area and would be happy to provide further information to the committee should you wish to explore this possibility further. We have also raised this topic with the Legislation, Justice and Constitution Committee but understand that the Equality and Social Justice Committee may be better placed to consider this request.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P. Cotterill', is enclosed in a light grey rectangular box.

Pippa Cotterill,

Head of Wales Office